

Executive Summary
of the
Final Environmental Impact Statement
for the
Routt National Forest
Land and Resource Management Plan (1997 Revision)

Garfield, Grand, Jackson, Moffat, Rio Blanco and Routt Counties, Colorado

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This document summarize the analysis of seven alternatives, which were developed for possible management (Land and Resource Management Plan) of the 1.3 million acres administered by the Routt National Forest. Alternatives analyzed in detail are identified as Alternatives A through G. Alternative C is the selected alternative and will become the next Forest Plan, which will guide management of the Routt National Forest for the decade 1998-2008 and beyond.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

We have revised the Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1983 Plan), issued in November 1983. A Revised Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) were needed to address new and changing information about the Forest and its uses, as well as to satisfy regulatory requirements. The Revised Plan changed the 1983 Plan significantly. Our purpose was to develop a plan which will guide our natural resource management activities on the Routt National Forest and meet the objectives of federal law, regulations, and policy for the next ten to fifteen years.

Location

The Routt National Forest covers 1.3 million acres in northwestern Colorado.

Why Did We Revise the Forest Plan?

Forest plan revision is required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) every ten to fifteen years. In 1991, the process of identifying areas of the 1983 Plan that might require change began. The 1983 Plan was evaluated to determine how well it was working and whether conditions or public perceptions had changed significantly.

Initially, a Forest interdisciplinary team looked at environmental conditions, historical use and occupation, and past and current data. We asked for public input on management activities and the condition of forest lands and resources at a series of open house meetings designed to identify possible areas of change. This input helped identify preliminary issues. In the process of reviewing the current status of Forest land and resources and communicating with the public, we identified four reasons for revising the 1983 Plan:

1. Improved information about forest land and resources.
2. Improved and/or altered scientific knowledge and application.
3. Changing professional and public concern for social, economic, and environmental issues.
4. Existing laws and newly created and/or changed laws and policies.

Throughout the revision process, from the delineation of preliminary issues to the identification of revision topics and the development of alternatives, we made a conscious effort to involve the public. Over the course of four years, we held numerous meetings and received hundreds of letters identifying issues and concerns. For a comprehensive description of the revision process, see the Preface in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

Revision Topics

When resource conditions, technical knowledge, or public perception of resource management create a "need for change," revision topics are the result. Each of these topics would generally drive significant modification of the 1983 Plan because they either change management direction over large areas or alter the mix of goods and services. We identified these five revision topics:

- Biological Diversity
- Roadless Areas and Wilderness
- Timber Suitability and Allowable Sale Quantity
- Recreation and Travel Management
- Wild and Scenic Rivers

For a detailed discussion of the revision topics, see Chapter 1 of the FEIS.

The Alternatives

Different approaches for dealing with the revision topics gave rise to seven alternatives, identified as Alternatives A through G in the succeeding discussion. These alternatives represent a wide range of management options for the future. The seven alternatives have several things in common. Multiple-use management and ecosystem management are a part of all seven. The alternatives also share a set of basic goals, standards, and guidelines which protect forest health and resources and ensure compliance with applicable laws. The alternatives are described in greater detail in Chapter 2 of the FEIS and in the Record of Decision (ROD).

For consistency with other forests in the Rocky Mountain Region and surrounding regions, the seven alternatives are described and mapped using new management area prescriptions. Management area prescriptions serve the same function that zoning does in an urban setting. They delineate different areas on the Forest and describe the opportunities available and kinds of management activities that can occur. Multiple use occurs on all prescriptions to some degree, however each management area has a particular focus. For example, recreation, grazing, and wildlife use occur across the Forest, but are specifically emphasized in management area prescriptions 1.32 and 3.31 for recreation, 5.12 for grazing, and 5.41 for wildlife. More information on management area prescriptions and their emphasis is provided in Chapter 2 of the Revised Plan. Table 2 on page 8 lists the management area prescriptions used in the FEIS alternatives.

The management area prescriptions are grouped into categories of similar management intensities. Categories range from minimal to substantial human-caused changes. In each alternative, land is allocated to prescriptions in the various categories depending on the emphasis of the alternative. Table 1 describes the categories and gives examples.

Table 1. Management Area Prescription Categories		
Category	Description	Example
Category 1	Preservation lands, very little human influence	Wilderness areas
Category 2	Conservation lands representing rare ecosystems	Research Natural Areas (RNAs)
Category 3	Areas with limited use, but more human activities allowed	Motorized backcountry areas
Category 4	Recreation areas	Scenery, dispersed recreation
Category 5	Forested ecosystems providing timber and range products	General forest and rangelands
Category 7	Forest Service land adjacent to private land	
Category 8	Ski areas and utility corridors	

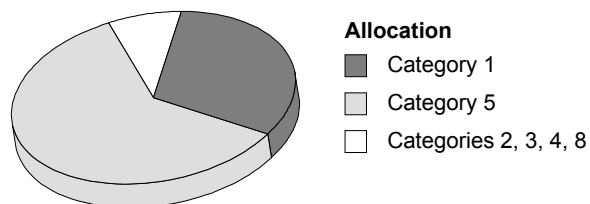
Descriptions of the Alternatives

The figures below show the percent of the Forest with minimal human influence (Category 1) versus the percent where more active management can occur (Category 5) for each alternative. In all alternatives, the allocations in Categories 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8 are small (12% or less). The acreages in those categories were combined, and the categories are displayed together.

Alternative A is an updated No Action Alternative. Under this alternative, management for the next 10 years would be based on an updated version of 1983 Plan. The updated version includes new technology, management area prescriptions, and standards and guidelines.

In Figure 1, Category 5 makes up 60% of the Forest. 32% is allocated to Category 1.

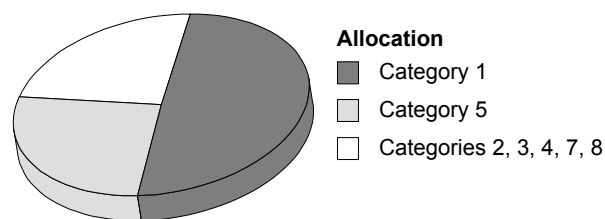
Figure 1. Alternative A Management Allocations



Alternative B focuses on the roadless revision topic and biological diversity issues of old growth and mature forests. Roadless areas in backcountry management area prescriptions are maintained, and several areas are recommended for wilderness designation.

In Figure 2, 49% of the Forest is allocated to Category 1 emphasizing natural processes. Active management (Category 5) is emphasized on 27% of the Forest.

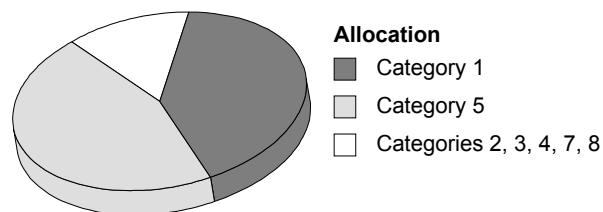
Figure 2. Alternative B Management Allocations



Alternative C was developed in response to all of the revision topics and the concern that forest management maintain an emphasis on multiple-resource objectives. Many of the programs under this alternative are similar to those in the 1983 Plan, however this alternative allocates more acres to backcountry recreation.

46% of the Forest is in active management in Category 5. 41% is in Category 1, as shown in Figure 3.

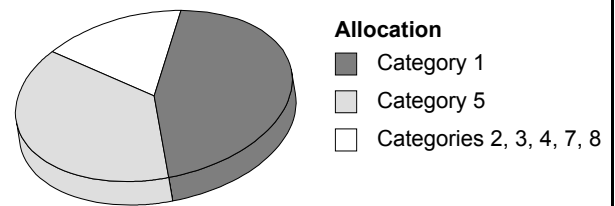
Figure 3. Alternative C Management Allocations



Alternative D maintains backcountry areas, a small amount of recommended wilderness, timber production, and biological diversity. It emphasizes protection of roadless areas and allows intensive timber management on lands that have been logged in the past.

Figure 4 shows the similarity with Alternative C. 45% of the Forest is in Category 1 which emphasizes natural processes. 38% is in active management in Category 5.

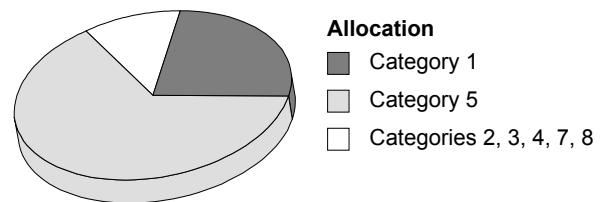
Figure 4. Alternative D Management Allocations



Alternative E was developed in response to the motorized recreation and timber revision topics. It meets the requirements for an alternative that maximizes resource production.

Figure 5 shows the emphasis on active management (Category 5) on 64% of the Forest. Natural processes (Category 1) are emphasized on 25% of the Forest.

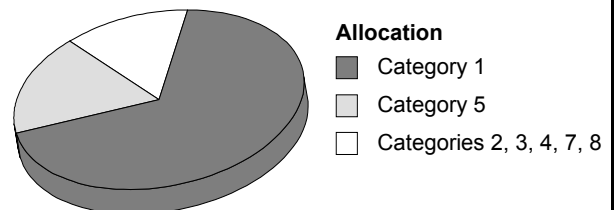
Figure 5. Alternative E Management Allocations



Alternative F responds to comments submitted by a group of local residents working with the Colorado Environmental Coalition. It preserves large tracts of land in a series of core reserve allocations and recommended wildernesses. Conflicts affecting biological diversity are resolved in favor of preserving or maintaining that diversity.

Figure 6 shows the emphasis on preservation, with 65% of the Forest in Category 1. The allocation in Category 5 is 16%.

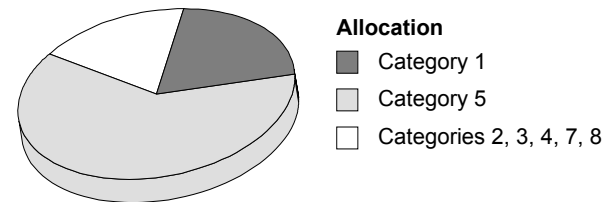
Figure 6. Alternative F Management Allocations



Alternative G was developed from comments submitted by the Jackson County Multiple Use Coalition. It was developed to address the concern that multiple-use be the focus of forest management. This alternative emphasizes a multiple-use approach to maintain or improve the economy and quality of life for local residents.

In Figure 7, active management (Category 5) is emphasized on 62% of the Forest. 21% of the Forest is in Category 1, with an emphasis on preservation.

Figure 7. Alternative G Management Allocations



The Decision

Alternative C was selected to provide management direction for the Routt National Forest for the next ten to fifteen years. It is the best choice for protecting the long term health of the land and providing a good balance of multiple uses. The ROD contains additional information about the selection of Alternative C and the rationale behind the decision.

Under Alternative C, many of the programs and levels of activity are similar to those under the 1983 Plan, however more areas are allocated to backcountry recreation. Fewer trees will be harvested because more timber harvest lands are in the general forest allocation rather than the intensive timber management allocation. Motorized and nonmotorized opportunities are similar to those in Alternative A, but Alternative C has more RNA designations and potential wild and scenic rivers.

Alternative C actively manages more acres of the Forest than Alternative D and provides a better mix of other resource values through the liberal use of Management Area Prescription 5.11. Alternative C and the accompanying suitable timberlands take into account the needs of people, the importance of biological diversity, the ability of the Forest to produce a sustainable level of harvest, and the balance between all of these factors. Under Alternative C, livestock grazing will continue on the Routt National Forest. The standards and guidelines in Alternative C will improve unsatisfactory conditions on rangelands, maintain the rangelands currently in satisfactory condition, and protect the Forest's fragile riparian areas and wetlands. Oil and gas leasing will be available on 80% of the Forest. However, we are projecting a maximum of 601 acres of disturbance from oil and gas leasing activities over the next 20 years. This alternative also provides a broad choice of recreation opportunities. For a comparison of the acres in each prescription under the seven alternatives, see Table 3 on page 9.

In all of our decision making, protecting the health of the land is paramount. Managing for multiple uses requires trade-offs but not at the expense of forest health. We will harvest more timber than some people would like and provide more roadless areas than others feel is necessary. Livestock grazing will be more prevalent than some people are comfortable with, while grazing restrictions will be too stringent for others. The nature of the process requires compromises from all of us. In Alternative C, we have found the approach that strikes the best balance between protection for and use of the forest resources. Alternative C is our "common ground alternative."

How Alternative C Relates to the Revision Topics

Biological Diversity - The habitats and processes that support biological diversity are provided for under Alternative C. On 35% of the Forest, natural processes, such as insect and disease outbreaks and wildfires, will generally be allowed to progress with minimal interference. These natural processes will be heavily influenced by management on 52% of the Forest and influenced to some degree on 13%. Three RNAs, totaling 31,400 acres, are identified for monitoring and research.

Roadless Areas/Wilderness - Approximately 19% of the Forest is managed as designated wilderness with no additional wilderness designations recommended. An additional 22% of the Forest is managed for dispersed backcountry recreation and maintenance of roadless character.

Timber Suitability/Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) - There are 357,821 acres suited for timber production. The ASQ for the first decade is 148 million board-feet (MMBF).

Recreation/Travel Management - There will be a mix of motorized and nonmotorized recreation, with a continued emphasis on dispersed recreation opportunities. Summer nonmotorized recreation is featured on 54% of the Forest. The Steamboat Ski Area is the major focus of winter recreation use.

Wild and Scenic Rivers - Portions of the Elk and Encampment Rivers, totalling 48.5 miles, continue to be recommended for wild and scenic river designation and are given interim protection pending Congressional action. In addition, all eligible wild and scenic river candidates, totalling 15.0 miles, are given interim protection until a suitability study is conducted. This includes portions of the following rivers: North Platte, Rock Creek, Red Canyon, and Roaring Fork.

Comparison of Activities Under the Seven Alternatives

Figures 8-14 (pages 10-13) compare the levels of some revision topic activities under the seven alternatives. Figure 8 depicts the acres allocated to wilderness and the additional recommended wilderness acres. Figure 9 shows the acres allotted to backcountry motorized and nonmotorized prescriptions. The estimated timber harvest for each alternative is shown in Figure 10. The acres of RNAs in each alternative is shown in Figure 11. Figure 12 lists the miles of potential wild and scenic rivers. Figure 13 shows the projected increase in late successional vegetation available as wildlife habitat under the seven alternatives. Figure 14 displays the predicted levels of livestock grazing at the end of the first decade.

Conclusion

This summary provides a brief overview of forest plan revision on the Routt National Forest - what we did and why and how we did it. All aspects of the plan revision are discussed in greater detail in the Record of Decision (ROD), the Land and Resource Management Plan, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and the Appendices. The ROD provides a more detailed discussion of the alternatives and the reasoning behind the selection of Alternative C. The Land and Resource Management Plan outlines the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines governing management on the Routt National Forest. It also describes the management area prescriptions and geographic areas in detail. The FEIS describes the reason for plan revision, the alternatives, the current conditions on the Routt National Forest, and the effects of implementing each alternative. The Appendices provide more detail on subjects in the FEIS, such as the analysis procedure or the biological diversity assessment.

Table 2. Management Area Prescriptions Used in FEIS Alternatives.

1.11	Wilderness, Pristine
1.12	Wilderness, Primitive
1.13	Wilderness, Semi-Primitive
1.32	Backcountry Recreation - Nonmotorized with Winter Limited Motorized
1.5	National River System - Wild River
2.1	Special Interest Areas
2.2	Research Natural Areas
3.23	Municipal Watersheds
3.31	Backcountry Recreation - Motorized
3.4	National River System - Scenic River
4.2	Scenery
4.3	Dispersed Recreation
5.11	General Forest and Rangelands - Forest Vegetation Emphasis
5.12	General Forest and Rangelands - Range Vegetation Emphasis
5.13	Forest Products
5.21	Water Yield
5.41	Deer and Elk Winter Range
7.1	Residential/Forest Interface
8.22	Ski Based Resorts: Existing/Potential
8.3	Utility Corridors and Electronic Sites

Table 3. Acres of Management Area Prescription by Alternative							
Management Area Prescription	Alternatives						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1.11 Wilderness, Pristine	59,700	78,900	73,100	78,800	79,100	78,900	79,000
1.12 Wilderness, Primitive	135,100	128,600	135,700	128,600	128,400	128,600	128,500
1.13 Wilderness, Semi-Primitive	65,600	52,900	51,600	53,000	52,900	52,900	52,900
1.2 Areas Recommended for Wilderness	0	130,600	0	24,300	0	338,600	0
1.32 Backcountry Recreation Nonmotorized	165,900	272,100	292,900	320,900	72,700	0	20,300
1.41 Core Areas	0	0	0	0	0	281,100	0
1.5 National River System - Wild Rivers	6,300	8,800	5,400	8,800	8,800	5,900	8,800
(outside Wilderness) Total National River System - Wild	14,700	18,800	15,400	18,800	18,800	28,700	18,800
2.1 Special Interest Areas	0	32,200	28,700	21,700	4,400	1,200	8,600
2.2 Research Natural Areas (outside Wilderness)	600	23,900	2,000	30,600	40,700	1,200	40,700
Total Research Natural Areas	600	70,100	31,400	70,100	70,100	71,600	70,100
3.21 Limited Use	0	0	0	0	0	184,500	0
3.23 Municipal Watersheds	16,600	17,100	16,200	17,100	17,200	2,900	17,400
3.31 Backcountry Recreation - Motorized	31,800	144,800	27,700	65,300	17,200	4,400	52,800
3.4 National River System - Scenic Rivers	0	0	3,700	0	0	0	0
3.55 Corridors	0	0	0	0	0	38,700	0
4.2 Scenery	0	41,500	29,700	39,100	25,700	0	45,400
4.3 Dispersed Recreation	53,100	42,000	51,900	29,400	26,000	10,100	49,500
5.11 General Forests and Rangelands - Forest Vegetation Emphasis	276,300	323,300	321,400	154,000	295,100	209,800	372,100
5.12 General Forests and Rangelands - Range Vegetation Emphasis	175,900	0	37,800	91,700	210,200	0	128,700
5.13 Forest Products	256,500	0	203,700	227,400	312,500	0	283,300
5.21 Water Yield	61,900	0	0	0	0	0	0
5.41 Deer and Elk Winter Range	44,800	43,000	57,700	48,600	48,300	11,300	50,900
7.1 Residential/Forest Interface	0	10,400	10,900	10,800	10,900	0	11,200
8.22 Ski Based resorts: Existing/Potential	8,500	8,500	8,500	8,500	8,500	8,500	8,500
8.3 Utility Corridors and Electronic Sites (miles)	59.0	59.0	59.0	59.0	59.0	59.0	59.0

The following bar graphs compare acres, miles, levels of activity, etc. under the seven alternatives in the following areas: existing and recommended wilderness, backcountry allocations, timber harvest, RNAs, potential wild and scenic rivers, wildlife habitat, and livestock grazing. These subjects were selected from each of the five revision topics and represent areas of particular concern or interest.

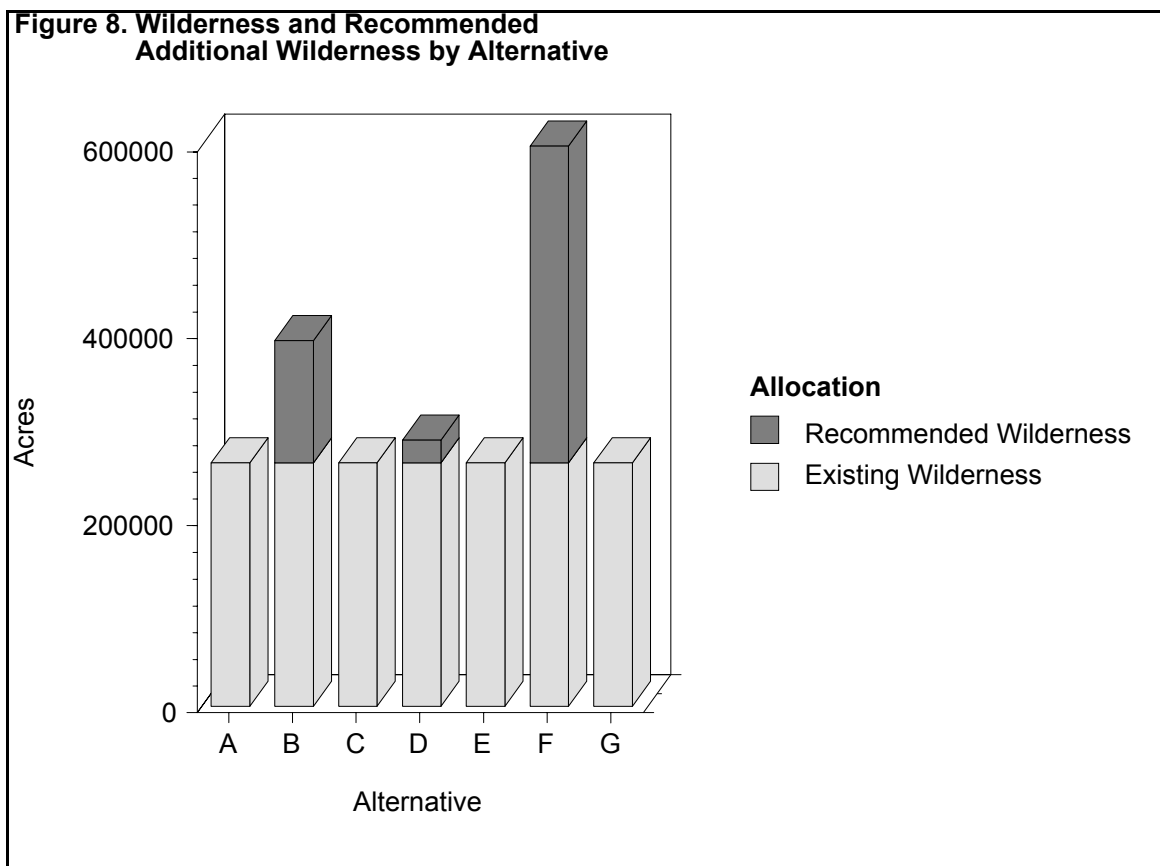
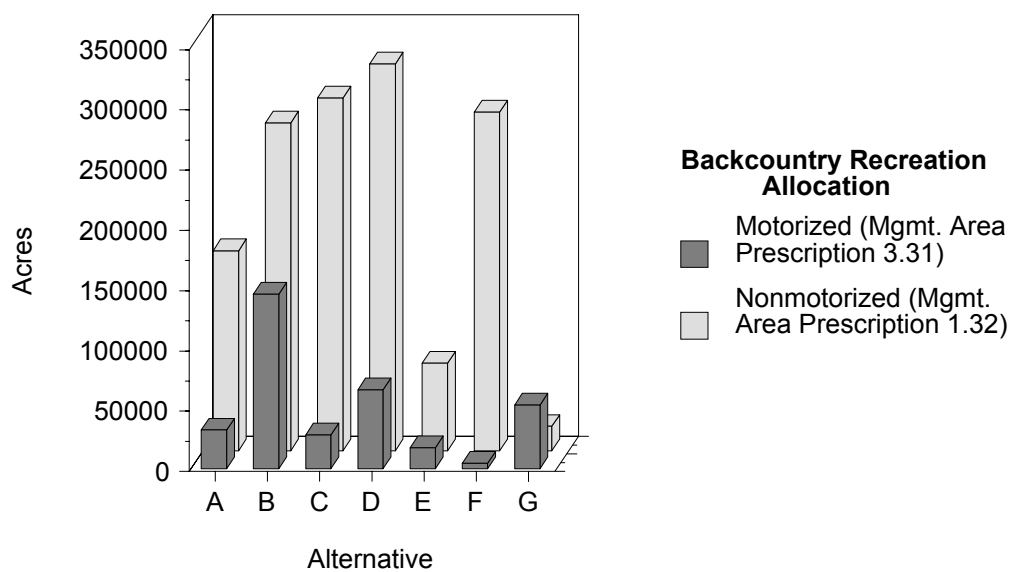


Figure 9. Backcountry Recreation Allocation by Alternative



**Figure 10. Estimated Timber Harvest
by Alternative**

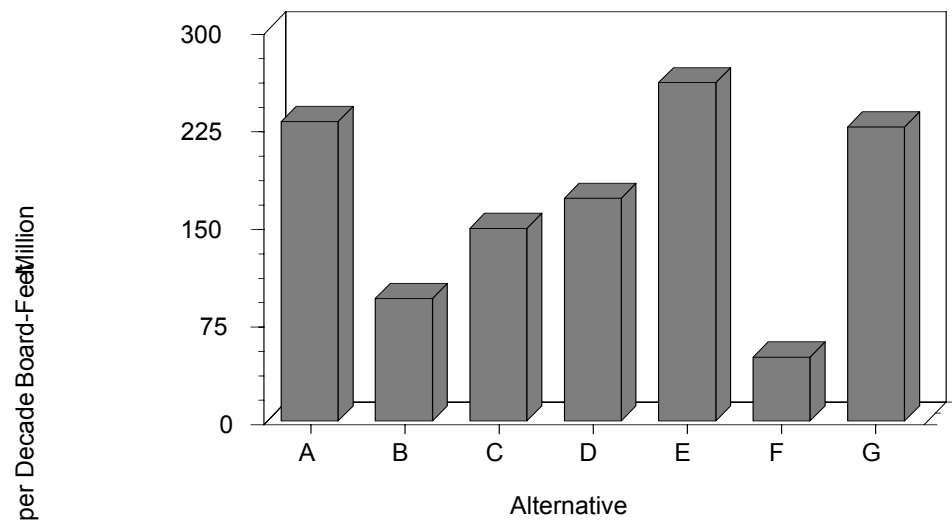
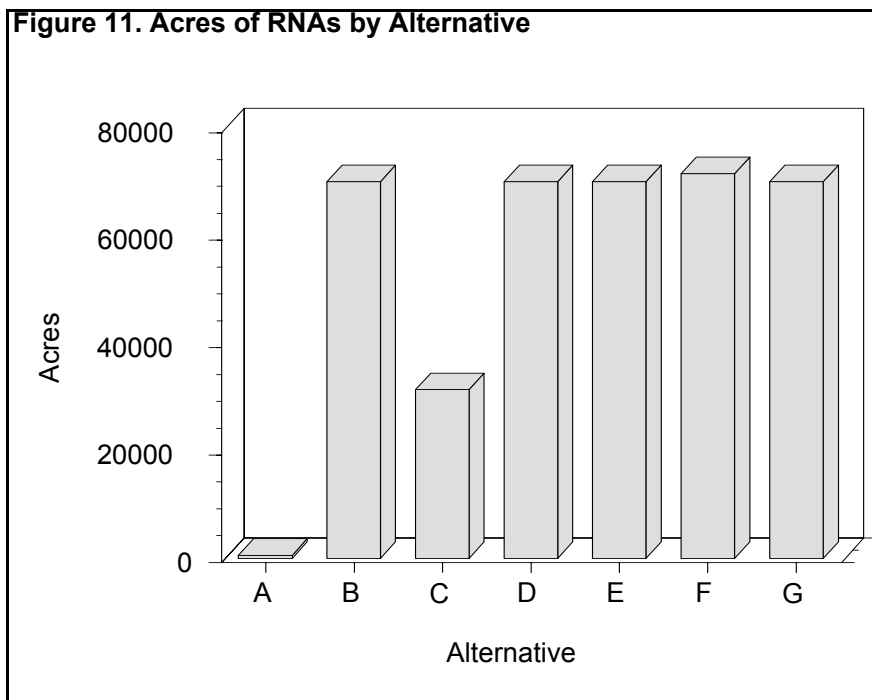
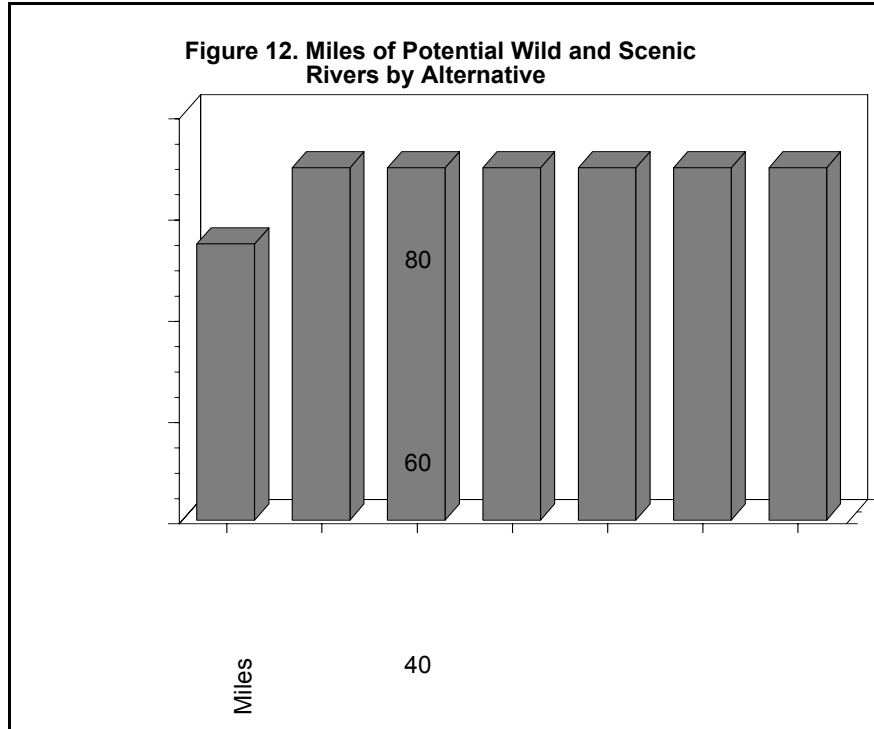
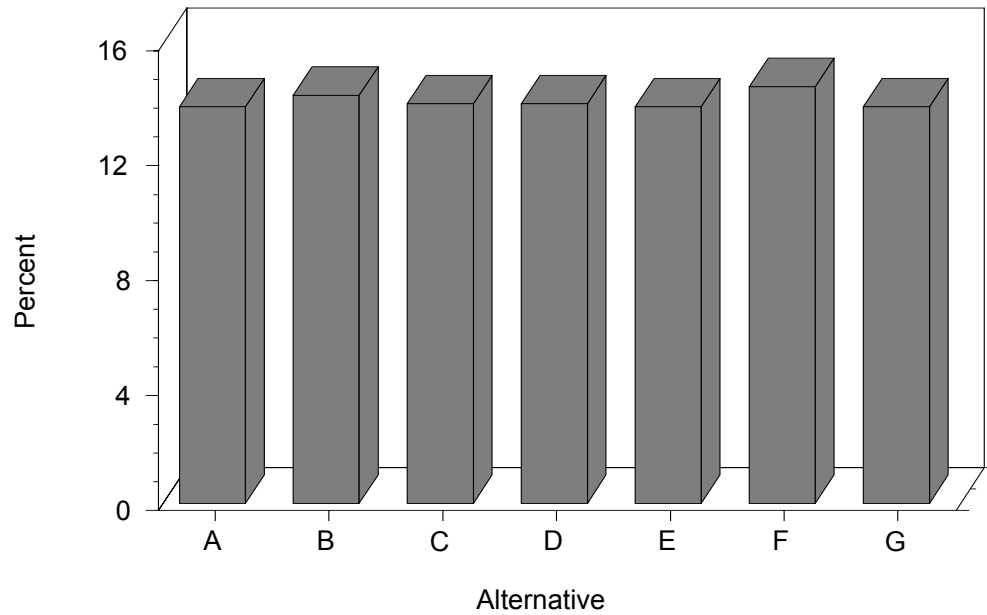


Figure 11. Acres of RNAs by Alternative

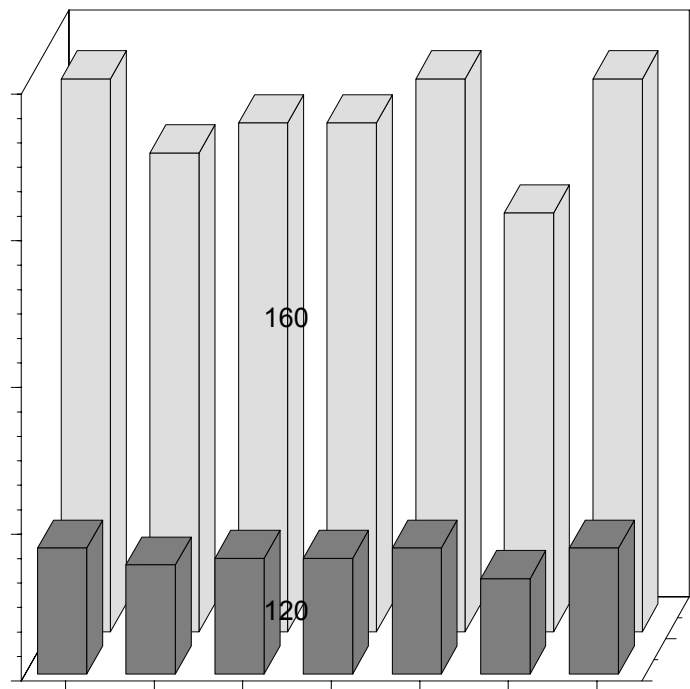


**Figure 13. Increase in Late Successional Vegetation
on the Forest after Ten Years by Alternative**



Late successional vegetation was selected as a habitat type of particular interest. This vegetative community provides habitat for species like marten or goshawk that are associated with a late successional forest environment. There is a concern that late successional vegetative complexes have been heavily managed and are fragmented to the point that they cannot support the associated dependent species.

Figure 14. Livestock Grazing Levels on the Forest after Ten Years by Alternative



Grazing levels are reported in sheep head months and cow head months. Head months are calculated by multiplying the number of animals by the period of occupancy. One cow month is the occupancy of an area by one cow for one month. One sheep month is the occupancy of an area by one sheep for one month. The difference is that the same area that will support one cow will support five sheep.